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CUBAN GRATITUDE

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WASHINGTON

James B. Donovan, the New York lawyer who negotiated the release of Cuban prisoners, has brought back from Havana a ray of light out of the gloom of Cuban-American relations.

Mr. Donovan reported yesterday that Cubans of all ages are filled with gratitude to the United States for the drugs sent to the island to

"ransom" the Bay of Pigs prisoners last December.

"This has been the greatest propaganda on behalf of the United States that you can imagine," he told the New York Herald Tribune in a telephone interview from his office at 161 William St., New York.

"The poor, the sick, the children, the elderly certainly feel grateful to us," he said.

Mr. Donovan disclosed that antibiotics have saved the lives of more than a dozen infants stricken with tropical disease. Having been "starved" for medicine, the Cubans are well aware that the drugs now being administered in their hospitals and sold in drug stores came from the U. S.

Although the Cubans have been indoctrinated with violently anti-American propaganda for the last four years, Mr. Donovan has been stopped by strangers in Cuba and thanked for the drugs.

Las, Saturday, for example, he was in Havana completing arrangements for the release of the last group of Americans held prisoner by Fidel Castro. On the way to a department store to pick up some souvenirs for his children he was stopped in the street by a Cuban woman he had never seen before. She told him the story of her husband, who was afflicted with arthritis and had been suffering severe pain until drugs became available through the American shipments.

"She wanted me to know," Mr. Donovan related, "that he had received much relief from the drugs and was grateful."

"On another occasion recently," he said, "an English-speaking youth came up to me at Havana airport. He said that his mother had suffered from ulcers and was unable to get relief from pain. Now that our drugs are available, he said, she is very happy and he wanted to thank me."

"This is going on all over Cuba. Everywhere people see drugs and medicine in the drugstore windows, and they know where they came from and they are grateful. They were 'drug-starved' before. When I was in Havana last winter I was suffering terribly from burnitis and couldn't even get an aspirin."

The United States agreed last December to ship \$85 million in food and drugs to Cuba in return for (Mr. Donovan disputes the word "ransom"), the 1,113 Cubans captured in the invasion of the Bay of Pigs. Shipments still are being made.

The drugs are being distributed jointly by the Cuban Ministry of Public Health and the Cuban Red Cross through drugstores, except for those medicines, including antibiotics, that are going directly to public hospitals.

Mr. Donovan said that it is "well known" in Havana that a certain antibiotic he could not recall its name, saved the lives of at least 12 infants they had been stricken, he said, with a tropical disease

that creates an excruciating pain in the throat, causing total choking unless cured.

Mr. Donovan said that even before the Kennedy administration agreed to idea of raising money for the food and drugs, he had anticipated that the appearance of medicines in Cuba would arouse good feelings among the Cuban people for the United States.

He branded as "nonsense" charges that have been made in Congress and elsewhere that American drugs sent to Cuba were being turned over to other communist countries.

Rep. William C. Cramer, R., Fla., was one of those who made such a charge, and he stood by it yesterday.